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## THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN ARTS AND CRAFTS\*

I am not altogether a believer in art for art's sake, and in discussing the relation of handicrafts to art and beauty, it will be with the idea that beauty is but one of the manifestations of right-doing. Though there are many ties that bind us to life, I take it that beauty, even if it does not exist for the express purpose, at least has the effect of making existence attractive.

There is scarcely any one who will not admit that whatever influence gives us a better hold on existence, or that leads us to look more hopefully on its outcome, is an element that cannot be lightly brushed aside as superfluous æstheticism.

Anything that bears the stamp of genuineness naturally appeals to us, and its very quality tends to charm. The charm of variety in any production must be seen and felt. In wool and metal work, clay modeling, leather work, in everything done by hand, there is an opportunity for differentiation, the worker being able to vary his production or design at any moment; thus an element of spontaneity enters into the result which gives it value. This the machine does not achieve. There being no chance for variety, the human touch is eliminated, and you feel in the result the surrender of the man to the machine. An article of hand-make is rarely discarded as long as it holds together, for its honest construction and varied surfaces seem to bear gracefully the hard knocks of time and usage.

We would all agree that a piece of music would not amount to much if one phrase in it was repeated over and over again, and yet this is precisely what mechanical construction does. I would not have it understood that I am minimizing the value or the superb results of the mechanical inventions of the age, nevertheless we must not allow the marvelous capacity of the machine itself to blind us to its oftentimes worthless product.

One marked feature of the handicraft movement in contrast to the mechanical facilities in vogue to-day is the element of limitations which the craftsman must court, and not shun. If, for example, we study some of the charming old examples of loom and bench work which fate has kindly spared to us, we are impressed with the fact that the charm of these textiles and other objects is due very largely to the limitations under which they were created. They were obliged to employ simple methods and genuine material. Those delightful specimens of early industries are so full of suggestions, history, and integrity that we are only too proud to preserve them as reminders of the sterling characters of our forefathers.

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Take our Indian work of former years: examine the weaving, pottery, beadwork, basketry, as well as any of the various implements and utensils, and you will discover them to be full of charm, full of honest merit, all eloquent with life, conditions, and customs of the makers. The fact that our museums are stored with these charming creations is alone a silent tribute to the lasting value we attach to the human element in all work.

Now, nothing is more obvious than the fact that a thing should be constructed in a way to suggest the purpose for which it is used, but when you stand in front of typical modern mantelpieces there is hardly a suggestion of heat or fire. These fireplaces are truly wonderful things. The fire openings are getting smaller and smaller, and the superstructure more imposing. Some of these elegant affairs, with gilded tiles for fire-bricks, were never intended to be browned by cracking flames, and I expect some time they will be lined, not with fire-brick at all, but with quilted satin.

Now, I fail to see why we should be any better satisfied with an imitation fireplace in the parlor than with a sham refrigerator in the pantry; but somehow we seem to demand more reality in the back part of the house than we do in front.

It will hardly be denied that our tastes are tending to luxuries rather than to simple methods of life; mechanical designs of every description are constantly being invented to make travel, household arrangements, and modes of locomotion more conducive to ease and luxury. We no longer walk upstairs, but are hoisted up, and we have only to press a button in order to have performed for us automatically countless service that we once undertook for ourselves.

How idle it is to preach economy to our children when they have no idea of what labor is involved in the making of the things they see so profusely used and so improvidently discarded. A home is a living place with the idea of permanency as its foundation. It is a spot hallowed by associations, to which one is attached by the joys and griefs that have gone into its upbuilding, and the articles with which it is filled ought not to be mere things, but should be animate with cherished memories, or expression of the tastes, convictions, and condition of the possessor.

To foster genuineness and simplicity in our lives and surroundings, it may be well not to avail ourselves of every convenient device for producing meretricious results, but rather to impose upon ourselves healthful limitations under which production and character are strengthened.

DOUGLAS VOLK.